DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 234 TM 033 395

AUTHOR	Stader, David L.; Lowe, Jerry M.; Neely, Robert
TITLE	Body of Evidence: An Alternative to High Stakes Testing?
PUB DATE	2001-08-00
NOTE	10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (Houston, TX, August 9, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Alternative Assessment; *Graduation Requirements; *High School Students; High Schools; School Districts; State Legislation; *State Programs; *Student Evaluation; *Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Evidence; *Wyoming

ABSTRACT

This report describes the Body of Evidence approach taken in Wyoming to implement standards-based graduation. The Body of Evidence plan calls for more than a single test to justify issuing a high school diploma. Graduation requirement rules, known as Chapter 31 rules, establish the requirements for a diploma. The body of evidence is to be designated at the local level. It should answer two questions: (1) whether the student knows enough to graduate; and (2) whether the evidence can support the answer to the first question. The Wyoming State Department of Education has listed four possible approaches to designing a body of evidence system: (1) course-based; (2) course-based and common assessment; (3) district-based; and (4) multi-district approaches. Assessments used may be conjunctive (scores on all measures above the criterion point, compensatory (scores on some measures offset lower scores on others), disjunctive (proficiency on only one measure required), and mixed-model. School districts must develop an evaluation system that meets criteria of alignment, consistency, fairness, standard setting, and comparability. The body of evidence plan should create opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in ways congruent with individual learning styles. The greatest impact from the new plan may be on teachers, who will not necessarily have the time to develop meaningful and multiple assessments. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 458 234

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Stader

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Body of Evidence: An Alternative to High Stakes Testing?

Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Houston, TX, August 2001

David L. Stader, Jerry M. Lowe, and Robert Neely

University of Wyoming

Laramie, WY

TM033395

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Body of Evidence: An Alternative to High Stakes Testing?

The State of Wyoming has come late to the testing party. In 1990, the State Board of Education established by rule that each local district in the state was to design standards at the local level. By 1995, the perception of the Wyoming State Department of Education, the legislature, and the State Board was that local districts generally ignored this rule. In 1995 the state Supreme Court, as part of a review of school financing, required the establishment of uniform standards across the state. In 1997, the state legislature enacted W. S. 21-2-304, which granted the statutory authority for the State Board of Education to implement standards-based graduation requirements. This legislation established two significant components: 1) graduation must be based upon performance or mastery of the common core of knowledge and skills developed by the Department of Education, and 2) establish through testing or other means that each student must demonstrate mastery of the common core of knowledge and skills in order to earn a high school diploma.

It was not until 1998 that the first statewide test, WyCas, was administered to every school district in the state. Wyoming's school certification plan is closely aligned with the North Central school improvement model. Consequently, the intent of the WyCas was school improvement. However, in the age of accountability and comparison of schools, the major news outlets in the state have taken the aggregate scores and ranked schools across the state.

In spite of the simplicity of a single test, the State Department of Education is pursuing a "Body of Evidence" plan rather than a single test to justify the issuance of a high school diploma. In response to the Body of Evidence concept, the State Board of

Education, in 2000, developed graduation requirement rules. These rules, known as Chapter 31 Rules, establish the requirements for earning a high school diploma. It is this rule that presents and defines Body of Evidence. Body of Evidence is intended to be a collection of evidence that demonstrates a student's mastery of the uniform student content and performance standards.

Chapter 31 calls for the Body of Evidence to be designed at the local district level for certifying whether or not students have mastered the content and performance standards. In the fall of 2000 legislation was introduced, as Senate Bill 16, to codify the Body of Evidence plan into law. However, during a confusing 2001 legislative session, the bill sponsors and the State Department of Education withdrew the bill. One of the most debated issues focused on diplomas. Chapter 31 Rules call for one diploma with levels of certification. Originally, the intent was for three levels of certification. This was later amended to two levels of certification. The comprehensive level signifies the mastery of all curricular areas, and the general certification signifies the mastery of a majority of the curricular areas. The differentiated diploma concept and the requirement that accommodations for various student disabilities be kept to a minimum further fueled the debate. Senate Bill 16 is scheduled for reintroduction for the 2001-2002 legislative session.

Body of Evidence

A district's Body of Evidence plan should answer two questions: 1) does the student know enough to graduate, and 2) can the evidence support the answer to question one? Chapter 31 of Wyoming Education Rules provides guidance for districts to answer these two questions. The BOE should meet the following criteria: alignment with the

state standards, consistent across teachers and schools within a district, and fair to all students. Planning for a Body of Evidence requires considerable thought. The State Department of Education lists four possible approaches for designing a Body of Evidence system.

Course-based approach: In this approach, certain key courses are tied to standards and the grades in those courses are based on achievement of the standards. Consequently, course grades provide the Body of Evidence. The advantages to this approach include teacher buy-in and are considered by the State Department to be the most instructionally useful. However, the accuracy and consistency of classroom grading policies are notoriously fickle and open to criticism. In addition, in larger districts with more than one teacher responsible for a key course inter-rater reliability becomes an issue.

Course-based and Common Assessment Approaches: This approach combines the course base approach with some common assessments developed by teachers at the school site. The advantages of this method are the encouragement of teacher collaboration and the increase in the reliability (and defensiveability) of the decision-making process. The major disadvantage is the time required for teachers to collaborate.

District-based Approach; This approach relies on stand-alone assessments at key points during the four years of high school. The major advantage to this system is simplicity. It would be easier to ensure technical quality and would be easier to explain to the public and justify to the state. The disadvantages include teacher buy-in may diminish and the lure of a single assessment violates the intent of Chapter 31 rules.

Multi-district approaches: Similar to the district-based approach, but requires the collaboration of two or more districts. The advantages include credibility, collaboration,

and the pooling of resources. The disadvantages include the politics of interdistrict rivalry, and in establishing common assessments and cutscores.

Types of Assessments

Chapter 31 Rules requires multiple assessments and opportunities for students to demonstrate competency. Several different types of assessments are available to districts to establish evidence that a student has met a particular standard. These measurements include:

Conjunctive: In a conjunctive model, scores on all measures used must be above the criterion point (cutscore) for the student to have met the overall standard.

Compensatory: A compensatory approach allows higher scores on some measures to offset lower scores on other measures. In other words, a compensatory model would allow students to demonstrate competency in a majority of the measures to demonstrate competency of the standard.

Disjunctive: The most lenient of the models. Students need only to demonstrate proficiency on any one of the multiple measures used to be considered proficient.

Mixed-model: Combines the features of any or all three of the available measurements.

Regardless of the assessment system selected, when combining information at the benchmark and standards level Districts must use at least a compensatory approach and when combining information across content areas a conjunctive approach must be used. In addition, the State Department continues to insist that students comply with the traditional Carnegie Units for graduation.

Evaluation criteria

Regardless of the type of approach and assessments selected by the district, the Body of Evidence plan must be submitted to the state department for peer review. The goal of any Body of Evidence system is to support inferences about students' competency and to ensure equality of educational opportunity. To satisfy these requirements, districts must develop a system that meets several criteria.

Alignment: The assessments must be aligned with all district (state) content and performance standards. A district's assessment plan should include: 1) the major purposes of the system, 2) the specific grade/course levels assessed, 3) the types of assessments employed, 4) the specific standards assessed, and 5) a brief description of the assessments. Districts will also be required to submit actual assessments for review.

Consistency: The District must insure that the assessment system used demonstrates a high degree of inter-rater reliability. In other words, the district needs to demonstrate the assessment system is reliable. One method of demonstrating reliability to increase the number of assessments that make-up a particular benchmark or standard.

Fairness: The district must demonstrate that the assessment system is not biased against any group of students. Again, multiple assessment opportunities and formats are required.

Standard setting: The cutscores established for each performance level on the Body of Evidence system must be defensible. Defensibility requires clear descriptors of the various performance levels.

Comparability: The assessments must be comparable across schools and classrooms within the same school district within a given year and across years.

Implications

Students: The Body of Evidence plan should create opportunities for students to demonstrate competency in ways congruent with individual learning styles. Hopefully by addressing various learning styles and providing multiple assessments schools in Wyoming will become more engaging and provide students a better, more rounded

educational opportunity than students receive in skill and drill schools across the nation. However, the concern for IEP students remains at the forefront of most discussions.

Teachers: The Body of Evidence plan may have the greatest impact on teachers. Changes in teacher methodology and assessments have been notoriously difficult. This difficulty increases the lure of a course-based approach. In addition, time is always a factor. It is difficult to imagine teachers across the state developing meaningful and multiple assessments without significant release time. The State Department of Education or the legislature has not addressed the real implications of this problem.

School improvement: School classification in Wyoming will continue to be tied to improvements in WyCas scores. Failure to continuously improve scores from all student groups will result in classification consequences. It will be interesting to follow the incongruities of the Body of Evidence plan and a classification scheme driven by a single test.

Political: Politics generates conflict. The various agendas of state legislatures and the complexity of the Body of Evidence plan make passage of an intact Chapter 31 Rule difficult and problematic. In addition, very few policy leaders in Wyoming have seemly given much thought to the long-term implications of a Body of Evidence plan. And as always, the proponents of the testing juggernaught continue their efforts to derail any other plan.

References

Chapter 31: Graduation Requirements. Wyoming State Board of Education (2000).

Marion, S. (2001, June). Wyoming's graduation requirements and body of evidence assessment system. Paper presented at the University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY.

Marion, S. & Stevens, S. (2001). The Wyoming assessment handbook. Cheyenne, WY: Wyoming Department of Education.

Senate Bill 16. Wyoming State Senate (2000)